



North Cape Lutheran Church

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A Pastoral Message on the Sanctuary Church

Dear Church Family,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our savior Jesus Christ.

Last week, our denomination, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, met in Milwaukee for the 2019 Churchwide Assembly. The Churchwide Assembly is the highest legislative body of the national expression of the church. As part of their work, voting members approved a resolution designating the ELCA as a sanctuary body.

So...what does it mean to be a “sanctuary body?” News reports in recent days have offered a variety of definitions, and some of them have been misleading or inaccurate. Let me take this opportunity to share what I know and understand.

First, the resolution does not advocate illegal actions as reported by some media outlets. As the church, we are guided by the Gospel to follow the two greatest commandments of Jesus “to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves” (Matthew 22:37-40). We work within our communities to spread the hope, love, and healing of Christ. At its core, the designation of the ELCA as a sanctuary body is a declaration that caring for immigrants and refugees is a matter of faith. It is not a partisan act nor a legal challenge. It is the mission of the church to love. True...some people may decide to engage in acts of civil disobedience, but that is matter of personal conscience and personal accountability. It is not a directive of the ELCA or this congregation.

The action taken by the Churchwide Assembly applies to the Churchwide organization. It is not a mandate for congregations. Congregations functionally drive the ELCA through mission and ministry in local communities. So...while this resolution does not prescribe how we act, it does provide an opportunity for congregations to pray, study, and discern together how we might express the love of Christ to immigrants and refugees.

At its founding, North Cape Lutheran Church was a sanctuary for Norwegian immigrants. The ancestors who built this church relied on the ministry of this congregation to guide the development of their lives. I am so humbled to be part of this tradition that continues today. Even now, we are engaged in faithful action to address human suffering in Central America—a source of many refugees. Through our partnership with Jesus de Vida Lutheran Church and the ministry of Pastor Martir Vigil in El Salvador, we are working to provide a safe place for youth in the face of violent pressure from gangs. We have partnered to provide a church facility with spiritual care and educational opportunities (such as a computer lab and school scholarships). So...we are already working to provide a place of peace (a sanctuary) in Central America.

We are also providing sanctuary to people in need right here in Western Racine County—through our partnership with the Union Grove Food Pantry and the Women’s Resource Center, for example.

I hope that you will join me in embracing the call to nurture the ministry of North Cape Lutheran Church so that it is a place of peace. May God guide and direct us to bring hope, healing, and love to all who come within the reach of our embrace.

Peace,
Pastor Brad Brown